

INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION IN  
SOUTHAMPTON DURING THE  
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

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The commercial policy of the seventeenth century was strictly protectionist. Economic ideas not only supported the efforts of legislators to prevent foreign competition, but also erected high commercial barriers between circumscribed localities. Although the belief that unhampered competition between individuals might issue in benefit to the community had begun to filter into the minds of some of the more enlightened, it was not sufficiently general to destroy the elaborate protective system which prevailed. Accordingly when we direct our attention to the internal trade of the country, we are brought face to face with monopolies, patents, trading companies with exclusive privileges, private associations of capitalists, embodying economic doctrines far different from those which now prevail. The trade associations, which form the subject of the present paper, consisted of manufacturers and workmen who formed themselves into companies for the purpose of regulating the various crafts. These companies possessed special and exclusive privileges which were granted to them either by the Crown, or by Parliament, or, as in the case of the Southampton associations, by the municipality. They were akin to the mediæval craft guilds; in some cases, indeed (though apparently not in Southampton), being but the continuation of those guilds. The guilds had greatly decayed in the sixteenth century. They no longer fulfilled the objects for which they had been created. They failed to keep under control their apprentices-

they failed conspicuously to achieve the main purpose of their creation—the proper supervision of wares ; and their internal organisation was no longer adequate. The necessity of re-organising the various industries, of safeguarding the rights of the *bona-fide* artisan, and of apprenticing children so that they might be fully instructed in their future profession, led to the formation of these later trade organisations. It will be the object of this paper to indicate the character and scope of these associations, and recourse will be had particularly to the Southampton Assembly Book (1602—1642) which affords much light on these and other matters.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TRADE ASSOCIATION.

##### (A) *Hostility against Aliens.*

Dr. Cunningham, in his great work on Industrial History, has pointed out that commercial disputes in mediæval times lay, not between capitalist and labourer, but between freeman and alien. As in ancient Greece the dweller in Athens, or Corinth or Thebes, regarded all who did not belong to his city as foreigners, so the mediæval craftsman dubbed as alien all who were not members of his gild. In mediæval Southampton the merchant gild and the municipality were practically synonymous terms. The ordinances of the gild were the town's bye-laws, the officers of the gild the borough authorities. The burgess *was* the gildsman, and he together with the man of the franchise who shared the commercial benefits but not the local government of the town, was the only one who might ply his craft within our ancient walls. All others were aliens whose very presence within the town was a matter of sufferance. Later on when the merchant gild had lost its power, and commerce was re-organised by the formation of trade associations within the municipality, this conservative and protective instinct still remained. The craftsmen often complained bitterly of the competition of strangers, or "foreigners," who had defied their monopoly. They frequently betook themselves to the town authorities for redress of this grievance, and these authorities lent a willing ear to their representations. For, indeed, those responsible for the

government of the borough were just, as anxious as the craftsmen to keep the audacious "foreigner" outside; only the considerations which swayed them would seem to have been somewhat different from those which influenced the tradesmen. These latter resented the competition of men who did not belong to their company, while the town authorities appear to have been anxious for their removal lest they should ever become chargeable to the town as paupers. In the Southampton Assembly Book appear four long petitions from the tailors, shoemakers, sergemakers, and clothworkers respectively, begging that a settled company in each of these crafts might be formed; and it is noteworthy that the preamble to each complains in very strong terms of the competition of "foreigners." The tailors' petition commences as follows:—"That whereas divers persons beinge fforryners and not ffreemen of the said Towne of Southton doe usuallie come unto and inhabite in the said Towne of Soutton and there keep shoppes and procure unto themselves much of the worcke within the said Towne belonginge unto the said Craft and mystery of Taylors by reason whereof divers of the Taylors ffreemen of the said towne are oftentimes without worcke and thereby much ympoverished and not able to live and maynetyne themselves their wives and families and are like more and more to decay by reason of the dailie repaire of fforryners to the said Towne if some speedy remedy be not provided in this behalfe ffor redresse whereof and for better orderinge of the Petitioners now ffreemen of the said Towne and such others of the said craft or mystery as hereafter shall be freemen thereof — may it please Yor Worps that this orders following may be by your Aucthorities (as farr as you may and in you lyeth) ratyfyed and confirmed."

Several other extracts may, perhaps, be useful as illustrating this point. An entry dated December 23rd, 1608, runs:—"The Blacksmiths came to the house humbly deploringe there present estate: for wante of worcke and compleyninge of manie in this Towne of that occupacion that doe worcke in open shoppe as privattlye in there howses. The w<sup>ch</sup> as they alleadge will in fine be there utter overthrowe, whereof they crave redresse. Yt is ordered that after Christmas next they

shall make search for such as doe offend therein and present their names. And that ther order shalbe given from Mr. Maior wth a s<sup>e</sup>riant (sergeant) to goe with them and shutt down there windowes. And if they shall afterwards offend them they are to receave such further punishm as in discretion of Mr. Maior shall be thought convenient." In the same year the tailors betook themselves to the Mayor and Aldermen, and complained of some "new comers and others of there occupation that worcke in the towne at there trades not being free of the Towne nor there occupation whereuppon they are ordered to have a s<sup>e</sup>riant to goe with them and putt downe there windowes and not to be opened again without Mr. Maior's pleasure for the same."

Sometimes, however, members of the association, for purposes of gain, transgressed the rules which they should have observed. Then their aggrieved brethren sought redress at the hands of the borough authorities. In the year 1637 the blacksmiths lodged a complaint against certain of their number who had employed a "foreign" journeyman, Joseph Jones by name. This man was meditating matrimony, and was thus, so it seemed to the town officials likely to become chargeable. Accordingly it was ordered "for the p<sup>r</sup>vention of w<sup>th</sup> inconvenience that none of the blacksmithes of this towne shall receive or enterteyne the said Joseph Jones into any of there houses or sett him on worke upon paine of such punishment as this house shall thinke fitt." In the instances adduced the members of the craft themselves took the initiative in hunting down the unfortunate foreigner. Sometimes, however, the municipal authorities felt called upon to interfere of their own accord. The following entry, dated Feb. 28, 1608/9, shows their activity. "The Biddells to be warned to take the names of all the clothiers and sheremen in everie warde, as well ffrenche as Englishe; and to warne them all to appeare there friday next to the end they may receive a charge not to entertayne anie more newcomers of there trade w<sup>ch</sup> comonlye they doe, tendinge to the utter impoverishm<sup>t</sup> of the state of this Towne." One other illustration will, perhaps, be of interest. In the year 1612, a certain "sherman tucker," named Chidioch Newbie, was summoned before the house and charged with receiving newcomers without the

consent of the town officials. A fine of £5 was imposed, which was, however, remitted upon his "humble submission." He was ordered "to put them away and send them out of this towne before this daie fortnight." The intensely conservative and protective nature of commerce in those days is well illustrated by the hostility shown on the part of the craftsman against the alien worker.

(B) *Subordination of the Company to the Municipality.*

Another important characteristic of these trade associations was the subordination of the company to the municipal authority. It was the borough officials whose authorisation was necessary for the formation of a company, whose consent was necessary to the ratification of all the rules which governed it, and whose co-operation against the foreign workman was necessary to the maintenance of its exclusive privileges. Every year the mayor, together with some of the aldermen and assistants of the town met together to hear a financial statement from the wardens of the craft. The fines, which were incurred by craftsmen who broke the rules, went the one half to the company and the other half to the town. Apprentices were to be enrolled before the town clerk, and he was to draw up the indentures. The apprentice, who, at the end of his term, wished to be made a freeman had to appear before the borough magnates and take the oath appointed for the freemen of the town. The authorisation granted by the municipal authorities for the establishment of the tailors' craft was as follows:—"The Articles and orders before menconed beinge by us John Maygor Maior and the Aldermen and Assistants of the said towne avisedlie and deliberatlie p<sup>ro</sup>vised and considered of, and by us considered to be very fitt and necessary for the said Peticioners and the good of this towne and not repugnant to the lawes and statuts of this realme. Wee doe therefore for us & our successors as farr as wee lawfullie may and in us lyeth (at the special instances and requests of the said Peticion<sup>ers</sup>) Ratifie and Allowe of all and singular the said Articles orders and premisses. And for the better confirmacion and in witness thereof To one part of these p<sup>re</sup>sents (presents) remayninge w<sup>th</sup> the said Peticion<sup>ers</sup> wee the said Maior Aldre<sup>men</sup> and

Assistants have caused the Comon Seale of the said Towne to be sett and affixed And to thother part thereof remayninge with us the said Maior Aldre<sup>men</sup> and Assistants they the said Peticion<sup>ers</sup> have sett their hands and seales The two and twentieth day of July Anno dni 1616." It is clear that in Southampton the local rulers were resolved that the trade associations should be strictly subordinate to the town's authority.

(c) *Nature of the Crafts—partly that of the Domestic, partly that of the Factory System.*

There is one other characteristic of the municipal trade associations of the seventeenth century which deserves attention. They marked the early stages of the transition of the domestic system into the factory system. "In the towns," says Mr. Hewins, "there was a combination of the domestic with the manufacturing system." The following deposition from the Assembly Books (1602—1642) will be of interest as illustrating this point:—March 3rd, 1609. "This daye Isaake Hereville, Isaake Legaye, Henry Ayres, and Henry Tost, and others the clothiers-sergemakers were called to the howse being complained of in that (as is alleadged) They sett on worcke in spinning there wolls as well the great as the little torne (?) for the most part The people of the countrie and not the townes poore people w<sup>h</sup> is verie unfitting, where-uppon they alleadge in answer to this objection That they doe for the most part sett the Townes people: Isake legaye for his owne part affirminge that this daye he hath in his booke about cxi persons of the Towne They farther alleadge that manie of those poore people of the Towne whom they sett on worcke doe purloyne and conveye away there worcke and never bringe it againe, Notwithstanding they have all promised to deliver there worcke unto anie such people as shall come unto them with a note under Mr. Maiors hande w<sup>ch</sup> shalbe such as shall instantly deale w<sup>th</sup> them and bringe them there worcke again without imbeaslinge the same." The full development of the factory system was yet far distant; still its initial stages are clearly discernible in these industrial organisations.

GOVERNMENT AND ORGANISATION OF THE  
MUNICIPAL TRADE ASSOCIATIONS.

It will now be necessary to examine a little more closely the government and organisation of the crafts. For this purpose, the four petitions to which allusion has been already made, since they embody the rules and regulations which were to govern the companies, will be invaluable. These four petitions contain practically the same provisions, much of the wording being identical in all of them. According to their regulations all the freemen of the company, or a majority of them, were to meet together upon a certain specified day in the year for the purpose of electing two wardens who were to be the overseers of the craft. These were to be entrusted with the receiving and expending of such sums of money as should fall to the company's use. Those elected were to be compelled to serve under penalty of a heavy fine, 13/4 in the case of the tailors, 20/- in the case of the serge-weavers—large sums for those days. They were to hold office for one year, and at the end of their time, were in the presence of the Mayor and other town officials to render a "true and just accompt of all their receipts paiements and disbursments" to their successors. These latter were then to take over the responsibilities of the office and to become bound to their predecessors to render a similar true and just account to those who came after them. It was also enacted that the fines levied for breaches of the rules should go half into the keeping of the wardens and half of the town authorities. They were to be rigorously levied; "for default of paiement thereof the same paines and forfeitures shall be levied and had by ways of distres viz by destreyning and sale of the goods of ev<sup>er</sup>y person that shall forfeyt the same and refuse to make paiem<sup>ent</sup> thereof." An entry dated October 25th, 1633, will illustrate the financial side of the companies' arrangements. "This day the Clothworkers of this Towne brought in their accompt to this house according to the orders of the Corporation, whereby it appeares that their stocke in the whole is Tenne pounds Eight shillings and ffive pence whereof the some of seaven pounds eight shillings and ffive pence was this day

delivered by Christopher Walliston, late warden of the said company, into the hands of Stephen Mason and Robert Turneham clothworkers, the new wardens of the said company, for the year next ensuing for which they have given bond to the said Walliston for repayment thereof againe to the use of the company on the XXth of October next ensuing, viz., 1634. And the other three pounds remayne in the hands of Richard Boles and Richard Mansacke clothworkers for which they have heretofore given their bonds. And the said Accompt is putt in the little box in the Audithouse window."

The organisation of the seventeenth century Trade Associations was very similar to that of the mediæval craft guilds. These latter consisted of:—(a) Apprentices. (b) Those who had finished their apprenticeship, but had not attained to the rank of masters. (c) Masters. The second of these three divisions of workers is not to be confounded with the journeyman class which was of later development. The idea which prevailed was that the apprentice would, in course of time, inevitably become a master; and the journeyman did not form a separate class of workers in the earlier guilds. The later Trade Associations consisted of:—(a) Apprentices; (b) Journeymen; (c) Masters. The regulations concerning each of these throw a very valuable light on industrial life in the seventeenth century.

(A) *Apprentices.*

The difficulties connected with the apprenticing of children loomed very largely in the minds of those connected with the various industries in those days. By the famous code of Industrial Regulation passed in the year 1563, seven years' apprenticeship was required of all artisans. This requirement, however, was not universally enforced. "The difficulty of enforcing apprenticeship," says Mr. Hewins, "accelerated the change in the guild organisation which took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, namely, the consolidation of the crafts for the regulation of trade and a closer connection between them and the Municipal authorities." To this difficulty the borough authorities, and those who framed the constitution of the companies were thoroughly alive, and they attempted to enforce with rigour the Act of Apprentices

"Noe person," runs the tailors' petition, "of the said craft or mistery dwellinge or w<sup>ch</sup> hereafter shall dwell within the said towne shall at any tyme hereafter take any App<sup>re</sup>ntice to the said Art or mystery of a Taylor for lesse terme than VII yeres nor shall keepe any more App<sup>re</sup>ntices then such and in such sort and manner as by the statute in that case made and p<sup>ro</sup>vided is allowed upon the paines and forfeitures in the statutes in the cases made and p<sup>ro</sup>vided conteyned." Orders were given that all apprentices should be enrolled by the Town Clerk in a special book kept for the purpose, and every master who neglected this rule incurred a somewhat heavy fine. None were to be bound apprentices who were not the King's subjects:—"Noe ffreeman of the towne usinge the said craft or mystery of a Taylor shall at any time hereafter take any alyen or straunger not borne under the kinges Majesty's obeysance to be his apprentice or covenant servaunt unles such straunger be first made denizen by the kinges Ma<sup>tie</sup>tie uppon peyne and forfeiture of XXs for ev<sup>ry</sup> person that shall doe the contrary." The apprentice who had served his term was to be presented by his master before the town magnates "to be admitted to his freedome in the said towne, wch apprentice at the tyme of his admittance shall take the oath appoynted to be taken by freemen of the said towne. And shall paie to the wardens of the said company . . . . . the some of IIIs IIIId (in the case of the shoemakers 2/-) And to the towne clarcke of the said towne for tyme beinge for entringe and recording his freedom XIIId." Further it was enacted that none, save those who had served a seven year's apprenticeship within the towne might set up shop unless a special dispensation had been obtained from the borough authorities and the wardens of the craft. Again none were to receive any instruction in any of the trades unless they had been duly bound and enrolled apprentices. These provisions show the great efforts which those concerned in industrial organisation made to enforce the obligation of the apprenticeship.

The existence of poor children thrown on the parish or on the town sometimes caused anxiety to the borough authorities. In the year 1610 a man, Richard Targett by name, who had

served his indentures with Charles Dervall, a shoemaker, received permission to open a shoemaker's shop without being called upon to pay the usual fine, on condition that "when he is willing to take an apprentice he shall take one of his towne's children by the consent of this house before he take any other." In December of the previous year George Ford, a blacksmith, took as apprentice Alice Johnson—"in consideration whereof and that the towne maye be discharged of all costs conc<sup>er</sup>ninge her bringinge upp yt is agreed by Mr. Maior and the Justices that the said fforde betweene this and Easter next shall drawe beere as a common victueller And then at the Quarter Sessions to be allowed or otherwise considered of as then shalbe thought fittinge." These entries, which record no mere isolated instances, point to the conclusion that the enforcement of the Act of Apprentices was frequently a cause of great difficulty to the borough authorities.

(B) *Journeyman.*

It has been pointed out above that the journeyman, as a member of a distinctive class, was of somewhat late development. By Elizabeth's great industrial code it was enacted that a master should keep at work one journeyman to every three apprentices. It had become evident that not every apprentice could aspire to become a master. The journeyman therefore appeared, and account had to be taken of him in economic legislation. Employment must be found for him, and he would fare badly if masters were permitted to overstock with apprentices for the purpose of obtaining cheap labour. An entry in the Assembly Book well brings out this point. It 1609 it was enacted that no serge-weaver belonging to the Southampton craft should keep two apprentices to work together. The reason adduced for this order was that, since there were many journeymen in the town, work must be found for them. The apprentices on their part would receive altogether inadequate instruction in their craft if one master had to look after too many of them; and the presence of a great number in one place would tend to disorder. In the municipal trade associations the masters endeavoured to draw all their journeymen from those who had served their

apprenticeship within the town. To quote once more from the tailors' petition: "Whereas divers persons of the towne usinge the said craft or mystery of Taylors doe oftentimes take journeymen beinge fforyn 's such as have not served their apprentishipp within the said Towne and the same doe usallie keep in worcke in this towne for a longe tyme whereby such as have served out their apprentishipp within this towne are driven to seeke worcke in other places and alsoe divers other inconveniences happening within this towne by such intertayment of fforyners that thereby noe person usinge the said art craft or mystery in this towne shall hereafter retayne or keepe in worcke within this towne or the liberties thereof any fforyn journeyman not having beene bound apprentize to the said Art or mistery of a Taylor within the said Towne or liberties thereof without the speciall leave and licence of the Maior of the towne of Southampton for the tyme being and alsoe of the wardens of the said company for the tyme beinge thereunto first had and obteyned." Any foreign journeyman, who had obtained the requisite permission to receive employment, had to pay a fine to the town authorities and another to the wardens of the company to which he attached himself. In the case of some of the crafts the rules with regard to these workers were even more stringent. The masters of the shoemakers' craft, for instance, had to obtain consent for the employment of foreign journeymen every three months; and in the case of the weavers' company the worker himself had to pay a small additional fine at the end of each similar period. It is difficult for those accustomed to the enlarged ideas on economic questions, which now prevail, to adjust their minds to a type of industrial life such as existed in the seventeenth century.

(c) *Masters.*

It will be unnecessary to dilate at any great length upon the third class of workers included in the company—the masters. None were permitted to open shop who had not previously served a seven years' apprenticeship within the town unless a permission, for which a substantial fine had to be paid, had been obtained from the borough authorities and the wardens of the craft. The master was absolutely responsible for the

lives and conduct of the journeymen and apprentices under his control. The lot of these latter was sometimes a very unenviable one. In the books of Examinations and Depositions, kept with the borough documents at the Audit House, there is a very pathetic record which throws a vivid light on the sufferings to which poor apprentices serving under a tyrannical master were exposed. Thomas Baverstock, William Rosseter, and Stephen Terrey, three apprentices to a glover Robert Hill by name, were examined before the Southampton magistrates on the charge of stealing two lambs. This was, as is well known, a capital offence. Thomas Baverstock gave a detailed account of the theft, and adduced as his reason for committing the offence that "they were not allowed victuall enough from their said master to satisfie their hunger; alsoe—"their master hath whipped them starke naked for asking victuall of the neighbours. And further that their master makes them to worke on the Sundayes and hath beaten them for not workinge or beinge loth to worke on the Sundaies." This odious picture is certainly not relieved by the deposition of Stephen Terrey, one of the other culprits:—"Hee saith that their master hath whipt them for begging bread of the neighbours and that hee whipt them alsoe for stealinge the said lambes and that he hath made them to whippe one another with rodde and unles they would doe yt there Mr. would stand by and whipp them." It is to be feared that the lives of many apprentices were made miserable by the greedy and cruel natures of those who were their absolute masters.

We have not yet reached the land of Utopia, and the problems of industrial life weigh heavily upon the mind of the twentieth century social reformer. These problems are the more formidable on account of their extreme complexity. It is, therefore, refreshing sometimes to turn our attention to a state of affairs in which two or three clear and easily intelligible ideas reigned supreme. Seventeenth century economists held firmly to this principle—that private ambitions must be subordinate to national power, and in all industrial organisation merely individual interests were reckoned as of very secondary importance. The history and constitution of the Southampton trade associations reflect very clearly this type of industrial civilisation."